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ABSTRACT

The concept of alienation is discussed as an internalized state reacting to prevailing social conditions, and political behavior is hypothesized as being its outward manifestation. Purposes of this paper are threefold: (1) produce a new set of data to be used in exploring possible linkages between alienation and political behavior, (2) statistically measure possible relationships so as to contribute to an overall theory of alienation in politics, and (3) raise questions for the political science discipline based on the findings. A review of the literature indicates that the relationship between alienation and political activities is not dealt with beyond voting. A study of 760 randomly selected adults was conducted in the Memphis, Tennessee, area using written questionnaires. Data showed that no meaningful relationship was found with regard to alienation, participation, and support of political institutions, and alienation has a multidimensional characteristic that may exist at different levels of intensity and salience for different individuals. (Author/ND)

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ALIENATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

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In recent years, the concept of alienation has increasingly occupied social scientists. The concept has come to the foreground in a variety of contexts through the writings of Merton (1947),[1] Fromm (1958),[2] and Seeman (1959).[3] There have also been attempts to classify reactions to alienation into different "types" (Parsons, et al., 1953).[4] Further, some of these writers and others have attempted to measure alienation through scales composed of sets of questions which are believed to be able to detect alienation (Nettler, 1957; Dean, 1960, 1961; Neal and Rettig, 1967).[5]

There appears to be a common theme which runs through the usage of the term by the above-listed writers and others. The common theme generally defines alienation as an internalized disaffection with and estrangement from the prevailing social arrangements and the norms or values that regulate these arrangements. This internalized state, then, is a reaction to prevailing social conditions.

One of the purposes of this paper is to bring forth a new set of data to be used in exploring possible linkages between this internalized state and its outward manifestations, e.g., political behavior (does, for example, non-participation and/or deviancy result?). Although there is general agreement that low SES is productive of alienation, there is far less agreement as to its impact on and/or relationship with political activity.[6]

A second purpose of this paper is to statistically measure possible

relationships so as not only to bring about a clearer understanding of alienation's relationships with politics but also to contribute to an overall theory of alienation in politics which as yet is incomplete (Dean, 1960; Thompson and Horton, 1962); Merriam and Gosnell, 1924; Agger and Ostrom, 1965; McDill and Ridley, 1962).[7] A third purpose of this paper is to raise some questions for the discipline based upon the findings and also to raise other ones which the importance of the term requires.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Although recent research on alienation has sought to investigate its salience to political participation, this investigation has left some unanswered questions. Does, for example, alienation diminish one's preference for or involvement in politics or is it due to other factors? Is there a positive correlation between different kinds of activity and voting frequency? Does alienation produce a significant rejection of political parties? It appears to the author of this study that these and other questions have not been treated fully.

Characteristic of some of the literature on political efficacy and participation are, for example, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963),[8] Angus Campbell and associates (1954),[9] Erbe (1964),[10] and Arnold Rose (1959).[11] Almond and Verba found that political efficacy was somewhat enhanced through organizational activities but they did not investigate a possible relationship between alienation and organizational activities. (They do note, however, that alienation does exist in a number ofcountries). Angus Campbell and associates, like Almond and Verba, found that high SES was productive of a higher level of political efficacy, but did not treat alienation specifically. Rose's findings are similar

to the preceding ones--that associational activities tend to reduce internal feelings of estrangement. Finally, William Erbe found that one's SES was a more important predictor for organizational support than alienation was.

Besides these studies, other researchers have looked into alienation's relationship to voting. Joel D. Aberbach (1969)[12] and Frederic Templeton (1966)[13] were concerned with alienation's possible impact upon voting. Aberbach took operational measures of two forms of alienation he developed (trust and efficacy) and provided foci for each of them. He examined the relationship between the individuals' scores on these indicators and their political behavior. He found that, despite instances of voter distrust and feelings of a lack of political efficacy, the alienated voter was not passive. Rather, he found that alienated voters tended to support a party label and candidates running on that label at the national level. With somewhat different results, Templeton's study shows that the alienated votes does tend to withdraw from participation in national politics. Other data show that the alienated do vote, but usually in a negative way, such as against local referenda (Stone, 1965;[14] Horton and Thompson, 1950).[15] The evidence appears to be mixed and does not deal with the relationship between alienation and various kinds of political activity beyond voting.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This project was carried out with the assistance of an upper division undergraduate course in the Political Science Department at Memphis State University. The data was gathered in the greater metropolitan area of the City of Memphis, Tennessee. The students who distributed the ques-

tionnaires were given approximately four hours of instruction in how to locate their particular set of respondents and how to administer the instrument.

Census tracts were obtained from the City and from these the sampling frame was constructed. A set of target areas were selected out of all voting precincts in the city in the initial sample selection. City blocks were then chosen randomly within the voting precincts. Next, through a formula given the students in class, households were found by chance. Finally, any adult, currently of voting age, who was at home when the interviewer arrived was requested to fill out the questionnaire.

The respondents thus selected were, in our opinion, an adequate reflection of the total population of the city. There were only minor discrepancies between the distribution of age, sex, and race in the sample and in the population. There are a total of 760 returned questionnaires in the sample.

The political alienation scale is a six-item scale with Likert-type responses (Dean, 1960; Bonjean, 1966; Erbe, 1964; Srole, 1965, 1961; Bell).[16] The responses were divided into five levels from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' with a number (1 through 5) attached for quantitative analysis. The possible range for this scale was, therefore, from 6 through 30.

The part perspective scale is composed of four items with the same Likert-type responses as in the previous scale. The possible range was, of course, from 6 through 20. ~~On all scales,~~ [redacted] the respondents were divided into categories by the whole number score closest to

an equal percentagage distribution of frequencies.

DATA ANALYSIS

As stated above, one of the purposes of this paper is to ascertain any existent relationship of political alienation with different kinds of political participation beyond voting. The author has sought to do this in two steps. First, is there a relationship between alienation and organizational involvement, e.g., preference for political parties? In the operant theoretical formulation and in previous research, it has been hypothesized that the degree of political alienation would affect the extent to which individuals positively respond to party labels and programs (Campbell, 1954).[17] Further, it could be assumed that persons with relatively high levels of political alienation would tend to reject traditional modes of membership. A summary of this relationship is presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

no significant relationship existing between levels of alienation and party preference. The overwhelming majority of the sample regardless of alienation level demonstrated a preference for some party affiliation.

Another aspect of alienation and organizational support was tested that allowed a choice between three modes of conducting social action. The choices given to the respondent were political parties, organized community action groups, or neither one of these two. The largest number of respondents chose either political parties or community action groups to effectuate social and political action.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

This table supplements the findings in Table 1 in that there is no clear rejection of parties as such by the high alienation cells. The scores for the first two columns are evenly distributed across showing no differentiation from "low" to "high" alienation. The significant chi-square for this table comes from third column respondents showing rejection of the two modes of community action, especially in the "high" alienation cell.

These two tables serve to point up that the fact that political alienation and agencies for political action do not appear to have a positive relationship. They may very well operate in a different contextual framework not yet fully explained by today's social science. However, partisan politics and the use of parties for political objectives do appear to be unaffected by one's level of alienation.

The second step of quantifying alienation and its possible association with political participation is concerned with measurement of partisan activity. Could it be, for example, that political alienation influences the amount of individual activity carried on in behalf of a party and/or a candidate (Katz and Eldersveld, 1961)?[18] Certain activities were measured to test individual activities with political alienation. Characteristic of the data produced by this study are the following tables. By and large,

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

most of our sample had not done any political work either for a party or candidate, about 66 per cent. The significant chi-square is largely due to those showing low alienation and some kind of political activity. The remainder show no clear pattern.

The next table seeks to indicate whether or not alienation determines financial contributions to party electoral activities. As in the previous table, most of the sample did not contribute--over 80 per cent. The chi-square does show an association on further inspection of the cells. The skewness of the contributors toward low alienation accounts for the high chi-square, so the extent of one's alienation appears to influence political contributions. For those who did not contribute, there is a rather even spread across the alienation scores.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Certainly voting is one of the more direct and consistent indicators of one's political involvement. Some of the literature has inferred that high alienation may very well produce non-participation in politics and/or non-voting (Levin, 1960; Templeton, 1966).[19] The data is presented below to see what the pattern of responses was with regard to alienation level and presidential voting.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

A glance at the table immediately shows a significant chi-square and thereby an association between the two variables. But, on closer inspection, one can see that the bulk of the significant chi-square comes from two cells--low and medium alienation among the "no" voters. The high alienation cells, on the other hand, for both responses are roughly the same. It appears, then, that the association is complex. Further investigation both into this relationship and into the effects of other socio-economic variables in connection with voting will have to be done. Alienation, by and of itself, however, does not appear to be a major factor in non-voting.[20]

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

With regard to the findings, they appear to be these. First, no meaningful relationship was found with regard to alienation and participation and likewise for support of political institutions. Partisan choices, voting, and various other political activities took place within the sample regardless of alienation level. Thus, at least on the basis of this data, political alienation does not produce a kind of apathy, deviancy, or non-voting or other kinds of political behavior that would clearly differentiate the alienated voter from the non-alienated voter.

Second, more generally speaking, it appears to the author of this study that alienation has a multi-dimensional characteristic that may very well exist at different levels of intensity and salience for different individuals throughout the society. Although the measurement of these individual variations can help indicate an individual's relationship to the political system, definitive measurement does not yet exist, given the complex character of the phenomenon. Although we know, for example, what socio-economic conditions can produce alienation, we are not yet sure just how political alienation in its various aspects is interrelated with political efficacy or the subjective competence of voters. A complete explanation of alienation in politics may very well come to involve a mosaic of variables with personal, psychological, as well as environmental important contributing elements to that explanation.

On the basis of the foregoing remarks, the author believes that future alienation research should be both substantive and theoretical as one supplements the other. Certainly, social scientists would be well advised, for

example, to examine the acculturation powerless groups, ethnic groups, and youth groups as information gained from such studies could very well provide valuable insights into possible sources of conflict and change in American politics in the 1970s. Also, as public support for public institutions declines and thereby reduces their therapeutic functions as moderators of political conflict, what are the implications here for political alienation?

On the theoretical side, David Easton's systems theories have placed heavy emphasis upon legitimacy, efficacy and the like. Certainly questions raised by Easton's work have implications for alienation in politics. What about the counterculture of the youth today? Out of the civil rights movement, anti-war movements, and anti-establishment movements, serious challenges are raised to the established prerogatives of a post-industrial-technocratic society and government. What evidences exist here as regards alienation? Is Consciousness III the result of alienation?

These are just a few of the directions future research on alienation might take in order to bring about a greater understanding of the term.

Table 1

POLITICAL ALIENATION AND PARTY PREFERENCE

	Political Alienation			
Party	Low	Medium	High	(N)
Democratic	26.4%	41.3%	32.3%	402
Republican	40.0	32.5	27.5	120
Independent	34.3	33.3	32.4	207

$X^2 = 12.04$ df = 6 $p > .05$ CC = .12 $Tau_c = .03$

Table 2

POLITICAL ALIENATION AND COMMUNITY ACTION

Political Alienation

Action Through:	Low	Medium	High	(N)
Parties	36.5%	40.2%	23.3%	244
Other Groups	31.2	39.0	29.8	392
Neither	12.2	24.2	63.6	99

$X^2 = 56.2$ $df = 4$ $p < .005$ $CC = .26$ $Tau_c = .18$

Table 3

POLITICAL ALIENATION AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY

OR WORK FOR CANDIDATE

	Political Alienation			
Activity	Low	Medium	High	(N)
Yes	45.1%	32.9%	22.0%	255
No	23.4	39.9	36.7	499

$X^2 = 39.39$ df - 2 $p < .005$ CC = .22 $Tau_c = .22$

Table 4

POLITICAL ALIENATION AND FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

	Political Alienation			
Contributed	Low	Medium	High	(N)
Yes	52.7%	28.2%	19.1%	131
No	26.3	39.7	34.0	605

$X^2 = 35.62$ df = 2 $p < .005$ CC = .21 $Tau_c = .16$

Table 5

POLITICAL ALIENATION AND VOTE IN 1968 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

	Political Alienation			
Vote	Low	Medium	High	(N)
Yes	33.7%	35.8%	30.5%	525
No	24.3	43.0	32.7	214

$X^2 = 6.66$ $df = 2$ $p < .05$ $CC = .09$ $Tau_c = .06$

FOOTNOTES

[1]Robert Merton, Mass Persuasion (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947).

[2]Erich Fromm, Escape From Freedom (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958).

[3]Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," American Sociological Review, 24 (1959), pp. 783-791.

[4]T. Parsons, R. F. Bales, and E. A. Shik, Working Papers in the Theory of Action (New York: Free Press, 1953).

[5]G. Nettler, "A Measure of Alienation," American Sociological Review, 22, (1957), pp. 670-677; Dwight Dean, "Alienation: Its Meaning and Measurement," American Sociological Review, 26 (1961), pp. 753-758; A. G. Neal and S. Rettig, "On the Multi-dimensionality of Alienation," American Sociological Review, 32 (1967), pp. 54-65. Also, see an earlier study by Dean, "Alienation and Political Apathy," Social Forces, XXXVIII (March, 1960), pp. 185-189.

[6]By and large, a significant amount of research on alienation has concerned itself with the socio-economic variables of alienation--income, occupation, education, and race for example. Because of this existing body of alienation research this paper will largely ignore it and deal with its prime objective--the relationship between alienation and various kinds of political activity. Characteristic of earlier studies dealing with socio-economic variables and alienation would be the following: "The Non-Voter--

Who He is, What He Thinks," Public Opinion Quarterly, 9 (Summer, 1944), pp. 175-187; Julian L. Woodward and Elmo Roper, "Political Activity of American Citizens," in Heinz Eulau, Samuel J. Eldersveld, and Morris Janowitz (eds.), Political Behavior (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1965), pp. 133-137; Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren Miller, The Voter Decides (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1954), especially Chapter 5; W. E. Thompson and J.E. Horton, "Political Alienation as a Force in Political Action," Social Forces, 38, 1950, pp. 190-195; J. E. Horton and W. E. Thompson, "Powerlessness and Political Negativism: A Study of Defeated Local Referendums," American Journal of Sociology, 67, 1962, pp. 485-493; E. L. McDill and Jeanne C. Ridley, "Status, Anomie, Political Alienation, and Political Participation," American Journal of Sociology, 68, 1962, pp. 205-213; R. Quinney, "Political Conservatism, Alienation and Fatalism: Contingencies of Social Status and Religious Fundamentalism," Sociometry, 27, 1964, pp. 372-381; Marvin E. Olsen, "Political Assimilation, Social Opportunities and Political Alienation," University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, unpublished Ph.D dissertation, 1965; Marvin E. Olsen, "Alienation and Political Opinions," Public Opinion Quarterly, 26, 1965, pp. 200-212.

[7]Some attempts in this direction are: Dwight Dean, "Alienation and Political Apathy," Social Forces, 38, 1960, pp. 185-189; Thompson and Horton, op. cit.; Charles E. Merriam and Harold F. Gosnell, Non-Voting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), especially Chapter 6; Robert E. Agger and Vincent Ostrom, "Political Participation in a Small Community," (1965, in Eulau, Eldersveld and Janowitz, op. cit., pp. 138-147)' and McDill and Ridley, op. cit.

[8]Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 307-322.

[9]Angus Campbell, et al., The Voter Decides, op. cit., pp. 187-194.

[10]W. Erbe, "Social Involvement and Political Activity: A Replication and Elaboration," American Sociological Review, 29, 1964, pp. 198-215.

[11]Arnold M. Rose, "Attitudinal Correlates of Social Participation," Social Forces, 37, 1959, pp. 202-206.

[12]Joel D. Aberbach, "Alienation and Political Behavior," American Political Science Review, LXIII, 1969, pp. 86-100.

[13]Frederic Templeton, "Alienation and Political Participation," Public Opinion Quarterly, 30, 1966, pp. 249-261. For some general comments on political participation and levels thereof, see Robert E. Lane, Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1965), especially Chapter 5.

[14]See Clarence N. Stone, "Local Referendums: An Alternative to the Alienated-Voter Model," Public Opinion Quarterly, 29, 1965, pp. 213-222.

[15]Horton and Thompson, loc. cit.

[16]To measure political alienation in the local population, the author administered Marvin Olsen's alienation scale and the scores obtained thereby were treated as an ordinal series and grouped into "high", "medium," and "low" in each case. The lower the score the higher the alienation. (Roughly, 0-19, high alienation; 19-23, medium; and 24 through 30, low alienation). For the results of other alieantion scales, see Charles M. Bonjean, "Mass, Businessmen, and Workers," American Journal of Sociology, 71, 1966, pp. 1490162. Another scale sometimes referred to as social dysfunction or

disorganization, group alienation, demoralization, or what Durkheim called anomie; see, for example, L. Srole, "Anomie, Authoritarianism, and Prejudice," American Journal of Sociology, 62, 1965, pp. 63-67, and L. Srole, "Social Dysfunction, Personality, and Social Distance Attitudes," unpublished paper read at annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, 1951. For some results of Srole's scale, see Wendell Bell, "Anomie, Social Isolation, and the Class Structure," Sociometry, 1957, pp. 105-116.

[17]Angus Campbell, et al., op. cit., The American Voter, pp. 103-261.

[18]Although their study did not concern itself with alienation and local partisan activity, Daniel Katz and Samuel J. Eldersveld, "The Impact of Local Party Activity Upon the Electorate," Public Opinion Quarterly, 25, 1961, pp. 1-24, found political activity of relatively low visibility in the city of Detroit. It should also be added that local party activity at the voter level, in the city of Memphis, is extremely limited due to the emphasis on non-partisanship plus greater emphasis on candidate personality.

[19]Murray Levin, The Alienated Voter, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960); Templeton, op. cit.

[20]The author interprets this finding, as have others, that voting in part is a ready-made channel for the expression of protest to be used by both the alienated as well as the non-alienated voter. See Horton and Thompson, op. cit.

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